

## Julia Franck, *Die Mittagsfrau: Historia Matria* and Matrilineal Narrative

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When Julia Franck was awarded the German Book Prize in 2007, she was by no means a newcomer to the literary scene. The author had already published three novels and two collections of short stories before her epic tome *Die Mittagsfrau* (literally, Lady Midday, the noonday witch, 2007; published in English as *The Blind Side of the Heart*, 2009) earned her Germany's most prestigious literary award. In selecting Franck's novel, the jury members were unanimous in their praise of its "vivid use of language, narrative power and psychological intensity," calling it "a novel for long conversations."<sup>1</sup> Franck's powerful depiction of a woman who, against the backdrop of war-torn Germany, comes to the momentous decision to abandon her seven-year-old son at a railway station certainly provides plenty of material for discussion.

Prior to the publication of the novel that earned her the prize, Franck was quite well known in Germany as one of the writers of the so-called *Fräuleinwunder* generation, the "wonder girls" of contemporary German literature. Volker Hage originally coined the term in 1999 in an article in *Der Spiegel* that drew attention to a group of young women writers including Karen Duve and Kathrin Schmidt who were taking the literary scene by storm and whose candid writing, in his view, showed that they had no fear of clichés or strong emotions.<sup>2</sup>

Whether or not Hage's observations about this new generation of women writers were correct, the label of the *Fräuleinwunder* stuck, and it shaped how contemporary women's writing in German was read and marketed in the years following the publication of his somewhat problematic article.<sup>3</sup> Publishers and magazines alike complemented interviews with writers and discussions of their literature with glossy photos that promoted the writers as a phenomenon in themselves, the bright stars of Germany's literary future. Despite the fact that Julia Franck's name was never mentioned in Hage's article, she has always been depicted by the media as one of Germany's wonder girls.

Franck herself has always argued very strongly against the notion of a *Fräuleinwunder*, asserting that it is nothing more than a marketing label and that it actually undermines the legitimacy of contemporary writing by women.<sup>4</sup> Against this, she links her writing to a more general hope that women will begin to play a more dominant role not just within the family, but through the family in the wider arena.<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, Franck's writing often tends to focus on strong female figures that do not fit conventional gender roles or patterns of behavior. Her literary world is inhabited by strong-minded women who are solitary figures and who learn early in life to rely on themselves.

The publication of *Die Mittagsfrau* in 2007 brought an end to all discussions of Franck's work as mere *Fräuleinwunder* and launched the author onto a European stage. This novel is inspired by an episode from Franck's own family history; her father was abandoned at a small train station outside of Berlin shortly after the end of the Second World War. It was in fact the quest to understand what might have happened to cause her paternal grandmother to walk away from her child -- at a time when others were desperately searching for their families -- that motivated her to write the novel:

When I had my first child seven years ago, it became a burning question for me to understand what could drive a woman to abandon her child, to be so convinced that that child would be better off anywhere else than with her ... I find her decision to turn her back on her motherhood and her relationship to her child both strange and unsettling. I wanted to explore it and to try to come up with a story for this woman.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the driving force in the writer's decision to focus on this episode in her family history is her fascination with an act that seems to fly in the face of all that society and culture deem to be natural and instinctive to a mother. It is also telling that Franck reports that this issue only began to haunt her when she herself became a mother. The author's comments suggest that *Die Mittagsfrau* can be read as a more general exploration of motherhood, its expectations and demands, its possibilities and its limitations.

Like many writers of her generation, Franck is concerned with depicting the personal stories of her protagonists against the backdrop of the turbulent and at times violent history of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. Her epic narrative begins in Bautzen, a small town outside Dresden, in 1913, a year before the outbreak of the First World War, moves to Berlin in the roaring twenties and concludes more than four decades later in the remote countryside of what by then is East Germany. The novel thus depicts a period in German history that is characterized by some of the most intense and destructive conflicts ever witnessed, the Holocaust against the Jewish people, immense political and economic instability, and massive social upheaval and transformation. However, as this essay will show, the historical aspects of the novel are less important than its examination of the meaning of motherhood in the

contemporary era. In both aspects, *Die Mittagsfrau* taps into current trends in literature and culture, and in both Franck offers a new and different perspective on these issues.

### **Franck's *Historia Matria* of Germany**

This is one of many contemporary novels that engage with historical discourses by focusing on the compelling story of one remarkable character.<sup>7</sup> Franck's epic novel tells the remarkable story of Helene Würsich through two world wars, and as such, it involves a broader investigation of German history in the early twentieth century. In an interview about her earlier novel *Lagerfeuer*, Franck acknowledges that her writing engages with historical discourse. Her understanding of history is influenced by Carlo Ginzburg's concept of microhistory, which she sees as "a very good way of understanding the past."<sup>8</sup> The Italian historian Ginzburg's approach to historiography grew out of a dissatisfaction with conventional historical models, which to his mind focused on grand narratives and great heroes instead of the lived experience of the individual, especially where that individual does not fit normative patterns. Against this, he and other Italian historians sought to move the subject of historical enquiry from the centre to the margins, to the "little people" who are often lost or exploited in the processes of modernization and historical advancement.<sup>9</sup> As such, microhistory is not dissimilar in approach from what is known in Germany as *Alltagsgeschichte* or the history of everyday life, and in the Anglo-Saxon world as history from below.<sup>10</sup> Believing that that the fate of individual historical agents can reveal much about wider historical trends, microhistorians focus their attention on borderline figures and outsiders, who would not usually be subjects of historical enquiry; through examining their relationships and interactions with the community, they claim to be able to reconstruct a richer and more inclusive picture of that community. Franck emphasizes that

microhistory allows us to understand “how history becomes history. And how the history of a society can be mirrored in a very private, personal history.”<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, the Mexican microhistorian Luis González suggests that microhistory could alternatively be termed *historia matria*, a type of maternal history. In contrast to the metahistorical narrative of the *patria* or fatherland, González uses the term *matria* to encompass what is conventionally seen as the small, weak, feminine, sentimental world of the mother -- the family and the home -- and thus his *historia matria* focuses on that which has been ignored in historiography, namely the maternal.<sup>12</sup> If Franck's interrogation of the past can read as an analysis of German twentieth century history, it could be argued that hers is an *historia matria*, since it is evidently the domestic sphere that is her focus. She approaches the history of two World Wars from a different angle than that presented in conventional history books. Her novel depicts this era from the point of view of the women left at home: the wives who lie awake at night worrying about their men fighting on the front, the women who must work hard to earn a living in order to feed their families, the daughters whose dreams of a bright future are shattered by the harsh realities of war.

It is significant that the historical events of the period covered in *Die Mittagsfrau* are only ever referred to in an oblique way and never overshadow the personal histories of the novel's protagonists. This is evidenced by the fact that years and dates are seldom mentioned. The reader can only discern the time in which the happenings in the novel take place through allusions to certain historical and cultural landmarks: Helene's presence at the Berlin première of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*;<sup>13</sup> newspaper boys shouting the news of a fire in the Reichstag building (308); Helene's concerns at how the newly-passed Nuremberg Laws protecting Aryan blood

might affect her (313); or her attendance at the celebrations to mark the opening of the Reich autobahn between Berlin and Stettin. (345)

Equally, the description of certain characters serves as an indicator for the reader of particular social groups and political trends that would have been prominent in Germany of this era. The depiction of Helene's father in his hussar's uniform serves as a textual marker for German imperialism and the outbreak of the First World War. By the same token, the rise of the National Socialists is not dealt with in a direct way in *Die Mittagsfrau*, yet tall, handsome Wilhelm Sehmisch, with his fair hair and blue eyes and his weakness for blondes is immediately identifiable to the reader as the Nazi of the piece. Moreover, the changing fortunes in the 1920s and 1930s of Aunt Fanny, a Jewish cousin of their mother's who offers Martha and Helene a home in Berlin, reveal much about the economic instability of the Weimar republic and the situation of Jews in Germany during these years. When we first encounter Fanny, she is the stereotypical rich Jewish heiress who can afford to spend her days lounging around her luxurious home, recovering from her excesses of the night before. However, in the course of the 1920s, as the economic crisis is becoming more acute, Fanny is obliged to sell more and more of her possessions to make ends meet. After Helene's move to Stettin with her new husband in 1935, she loses contact with her aunt. A reader aware of the historical backdrop will already have assumed what Helene eventually learns in the most veiled terms, namely that Fanny was "taken away" (384) by the Nazis.

By contrast, *Die Mittagsfrau* undertakes an *historia matria* in that it concentrates on how history is made in the home -- in the daily business of surviving wars; in tending to the needs of the population at home; in healing the sick; in giving birth to, and raising, the next generation. Helene and her sister Martha are presented from the outset as strong female characters who are

active in shaping their fate. While their father is away fighting in the First World War, the task of supporting the family and running the household falls to them. In Berlin of the 1920s, they and women like them are the stereotypical new women, playing an active role in the workplace and driving forward social progress. As nurses, Martha and Helene contribute to the war effort at home during the Second World War; their hands save the lives of many civilians injured in the allied bombings, and they do what they can for the wounded. As a mother, also, Helene has a crucial role to play in the progression of history; on one occasion, another woman emphasizes the importance of this: "Thank God women like you are still having children." (378)

It is evidently through the character of Helene that *Die Mittagsfrau* engages most obviously with the historical events of the early twentieth century; she is the exceptional individual of Franck's *historia matria*. Helene's fate represents the fate of many mothers, daughters, and sisters who lived during this turbulent phase in Germany's recent past. Her premature confrontation with responsibility and financial hardship, her tragic and premature loss of a loved one, her struggle to look after her child during the war, and her repeated rape by Red Army soldiers after the fall of Berlin in 1945 reflect the experiences of many German women during this time. Yet *Die Mittagsfrau* emphasizes her heroism in facing down these challenges and taking control of her fate. By surviving these difficult years in Germany's history and by making difficult, at times even scandalous decisions that enable her to extricate herself from her circumstances, she manages to shape her own history and thereby alter in some small way the course of historical events. The personal histories of exceptional individuals such as Helene may not be at the forefront of conventional historical analysis of this period in time. Nevertheless, stories such as hers contribute to a richer and more inclusive image of twentieth century German history.

## **Motherhood as Matrophor**

In justifying their decision to award the 2007 German Book Prize to the author, the jury described *Die Mittagsfrau* as a novel that tells the disturbing story of a mother who abandons her child “against the background of two world wars.”<sup>14</sup> The jury’s appraisal of the novel is appropriate, since it emphasizes that the historical discussion is merely the backdrop to Franck’s interrogation of the maternal role. Indeed, although many reviews of *Die Mittagsfrau* have highlighted its engagement with Germany’s recent history, most reviewers focus more on Franck’s complex protagonist and her depiction of motherhood in the novel.<sup>15</sup> For many, it is the image of seven-year old Peter standing by his suitcase in a train-station, waiting in vain for his mother to return, that is the most powerful impression that emerges from the novel.<sup>16</sup>

Franck’s negotiation of the maternal role in *Die Mittagsfrau* both reflects and feeds into a cultural climate in Germany in which concerns about motherhood are ubiquitous. During the first decade of this century, the German media landscape has been concerned to the point of obsession with the country’s falling birth rates, and all too often, the reason given for the perceived crisis in maternity is German women’s decision to prioritize career over family.<sup>17</sup> Some contributions to the media discussions about the changing roles of mothers in contemporary Germany have generated heated debate, such as Eva Herman’s bestselling *Das Eva-Prinzip* (The Eva Principle, 2006), in which the TV personality blames the feminist movement for women’s reluctance to have children and controversially advocates a return to traditional gender roles.<sup>18</sup> The following year, the well-known German feminist Alice Schwarzer published *Die Antwort* (The Answer, 2007) -- the title of which implies that it is intended as a response to Herman -- in which she argues that men are just as capable of bringing up children as women and women are just as



entitled to find fulfillment through their careers as men.<sup>19</sup> Schwarzer's ideas were greeted with as much enthusiasm as Herman's, indicating the range of opinions that characterize discussions of motherhood in Germany today.

That a woman writer should opt to interrogate the question of what it means to be a mother in her writing is in itself nothing new. Women's writing has long been concerned with motherhood, mothering, and maternity and all of their cultural manifestations. In particular, the relationship between mothers and daughters plays a central role in literary texts by women, especially when they are based on or include autobiographical elements.<sup>20</sup> German literature of the late twentieth century features many instances of strong mother figures, who are often depicted in very negative terms. Amongst the more striking examples of this genre are Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* (*The Piano Teacher*, 1983) and Anna Mitgutsch's *Die Züchtigung* (*Punishment*, 1988), both of which feature very domineering and cruel mothers.<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Dakin Quinn uses the term "matrophor" to express "the persistent nature of maternal metaphors in feminism";<sup>22</sup> one might argue in the same vein that women's writing is also pervaded by the matrophor. In this sense, Franck's novel does not represent a new departure, but continues a practice in women's literature of interrogating the characteristics and the boundaries of the motherly role.

Franck's treatment of motherhood can thus be read as a contribution to a certain cultural climate in Germany and to a tradition in recent German literature by women.<sup>23</sup> The author also shows that she is conscious of the wider implications of addressing ideas such as motherly love and maternal instinct in her literature, since they go to the heart of debates about a woman's rights and responsibilities:

While I was working on the book, I very quickly found myself dealing with theme of feminism. I soon became aware that it is so taboo for us when a woman abandons her child because we assume from the outset that the most important person for a child is its mother and that she can never leave it.<sup>24</sup>

*Die Mittagsfrau* questions assumptions such as this and attempts to construct a narrative that might explain, if not justify, an action that in society's eyes seems to defy explanation. While the novel probes the expectations which society places upon mothers, there is certainly some truth in the suggestion expressed in *Der Spiegel* that its main character Helene is "an attack on the traditional image of woman."<sup>25</sup> Like Alex in Karen Duve's novel *Taxi* (2008) or Anita in Ulrike Draesner's *Mitgift* (2002), Helene is difficult to categorize in conventional terms, and this often makes her a problematic literary heroine.

Helene's difficult relationship with her own mother has an enormous impact on her perception of what it means to be a mother. Selma Würsich is anything but a conventional mother; her mental illness, exacerbated by the loss of five infant sons, prevents her from developing any bond with her last, unplanned and unwanted child. Helene's repeated attempts to reach out to her mother are greeted with coldness and indifference:

While Mother shouted at her daughters, cursing them, complaining that she'd given birth to a couple of useless brats, Helene kept on and on repeating the same thing like a prayer: May I comb your hair? Her voice quivered: May I comb your hair? As a pair of scissors flew through the air she raised her arms to protect her head: May I comb your hair? (27)

As Martha tells Helene, it is as if their mother's heart has gone blind, so that she simply cannot see people any more. The unsympathetic motherhood that Helene is faced with throughout her childhood ultimately evokes mistrust, fear and even repulsion in her, and it is easy to understand how a child confronted with such a negative image of mothering would grow up to become an adult with fundamentally ambivalent feelings about what it means to be a mother.

The narrative makes reference to a number of other female characters in Helene's life who act as maternal figures, and at times some of these seem to offer a more positive image of the maternal role. Some volunteer to play the role of mother, such as the Sorbian housemaid Mariechen; she attempts to compensate for Selma's indifference by taking care of Helene as if she were her own child. It is Mariechen, for example, who names the baby Helene when Selma shows no interest in her newborn child, and she even attempts to breastfeed Helene when her mother pays no attention to the baby's cries. Equally, Helene looks to others for the tenderness and attention denied her by her mother. Martha seems to play the strongest maternal role in Helene's life, and she responds to Helene's need for mothering by taking on the conventional tasks associated with a mother, looking after her younger sister and encouraging her to follow her dreams of becoming a doctor.

Given Helene's own experience of mothering, we can well imagine the ambivalent feelings her own pregnancy evoke in her. It is telling that Helene opts to terminate her first pregnancy, despite the fact that her beloved Carl has already expressed his hopes of having children with her. Her second pregnancy, this time to her husband Wilhelm, is equally unwelcome. Despite her reluctance, there is evidence that Helene does all she can to be a good mother to her son. She breastfeeds her baby until she is sick and physically exhausted; she worries about leaving him when she has to go to work. Nevertheless, her difficulties with her

role as mother are highlighted throughout the narrative. Her feelings towards her son are often presented in quite negative terms; Peter is compared to an octopus whose tentacles surround her and squeeze the last breath out of her (405), and she has neither the time nor the energy to cope with his need for her. As the text emphasizes, "Helene had never been a Mama or a Mummy." (406)

The simplicity of the language in *Die Mittagsfrau* has led many critics to call Franck's writing cold and detached.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the starkness of the language in this novel is arguably crucial to its depiction of Helene's mothering. The bare prose, rather than indicating a lack of emotion, creates a constant tension that suggests an underlying depth of emotion. For example, the words used to describe the moment when Helene comes to her momentous decision are stark but by no means devoid of feeling: "She had to make a decision, she knew that; no, it was not exactly a decision, it was just something she had to do" (407-8). The fact that this crucial moment in the development of the narrative is presented in such bald terms does not detract from the novel; on the contrary, the simplicity of the language points to impossibility of encapsulating in words the complex issues involved in Helene's decision.

The shifting narrative perspective of *Die Mittagsfrau* adds an additional dimension to the novel's portrayal of motherhood. The prologue and epilogue are portrayed from Peter's point of view, and they offer a very different view of Helene than the intimate picture of her that emerges in the main part of the narrative. Indeed, the difference is so marked as to suggest that Helene presents an entirely different persona to others, even to her son. This double personality is marked by her two names; in private, she is Helene, but to the outside world, she is Nurse Alice, the resilient but aloof Aryan woman who works hard and appears impervious to the pain and suffering she witnesses every day at the hospital. The passages written from Peter's perspective

depict a strong, beautiful, capable, but emotionally distant woman who seems unable to offer her son the kind of love and affection he craves so desperately. Peter describes his mother as “the most beautiful mother in the world” (4), but even as a seven-year old, he cannot fail to notice that the expression in her eyes is “icy” (13). The narrative perspective produces a curious doubling effect; the presentation of two experiences of mothering, both from the child’s point of view, accentuate the parallels between Helene’s own experience of being mothered and the kind of mother she later becomes.

It is precisely this shift in narrative perspective which is critical to Franck’s novel and which makes her depiction of motherhood so powerful and so complex. It is especially significant that point of view moves from Helene to Peter at the crucial point when Helene makes the decision to abandon her child. We observe her deliberate, measured actions in packing his clothes and preparing his suitcase for the move, but from the moment they leave Stettin, we witness everything through the eyes of seven-year old Peter, who has no understanding of why his mother has abandoned him. In refusing her readers access to Helene’s thoughts at this decisive moment in the narrative, Franck demands that they decide for themselves whether or not her actions can be justified. Thus, the narrative perspective both enables the reader to view Helene’s monumental decision from all angles and forces him/her to take a stance on whether or not her action can be justified.

### ***Die Mittagsfrau* as Matrilineal Narrative**

One of the criticisms leveled at Franck in the reviews of *Die Mittagsfrau* is that the male figures in the novel appear clichéd and rather one-dimensional, more caricatures than fully rounded characters.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, we need only compare the rather simplistic depiction of Helene's father with the much more complex characterization of her mother to conclude that the male characters play only supporting roles in the action. By contrast, it is clearly the female figures that dominate the action and drive the plot of Franck's novel. Both in Bautzen and in Berlin, Helene is surrounded by strong women who demonstrate through what they say and what they do that they can steer their fate without the help of their male counterparts. This situation and the way in which these female characters react to and interact with each other suggest that *Die Mittagsfrau* can be read as what Tess Cosslett calls a "matrilineal narrative." Cosslett defines the matrilineal narrative as "one which either tells the stories of several generations of women at once, or which shows how identity of a central character is crucially formed by her female ancestors."<sup>28</sup> Yi-Lin Yu elaborates this definition and, interestingly, she points out that "women writers' preoccupation with female family relations often leads to the relative obscurity of father figures in most matrilineal narratives."<sup>29</sup>

Cosslett's concept of the matrilineal narrative provides a useful framework for analyzing *Die Mittagsfrau*, as it emphasizes the effect that the female figures in Franck's narrative have on Helene's development. Helene is clearly seen as part of a female lineage, and her female relatives have an enormous influence on her character and her sense of her own identity. Thus, while Selma Würsich's deficient mothering of her younger daughter obviously shapes Helene's view of motherhood, her difficult relationship with her emotionally distant mother is clearly also central to her development as an individual and by extension to the unfolding of the events

depicted in the narrative. The effect that this rejection has on her throughout her life is expressed most powerfully in the answer that, according to the text, "burst[s] out of her" when Wilhelm proposes. Her response is: "Something like me isn't supposed to exist at all" (312). Her mother's maltreatment of her has left her doubting not only her own ability to be a good mother but even her own value and worth as a person.

Nonetheless, Helene's later replication of her mother's behavior in her own mothering of her son is reflective of the "strong sense of identification between mothers and daughters" that Yi-Lin Yu sees as central to the matrilineal narrative.<sup>30</sup> Despite Helene's efforts to distance herself both physically and emotionally from her mother, there is a sense that she is carrying on her mother's legacy, indeed, that this is almost inevitable. We can only really get an insight into why and how Helene makes the decision to abandon her child by understanding her relationship with her mother. Her model of mothering may be lacking in every way, but it is what she has grown up with. Helene's ambivalence about taking on the motherly role is obviously rooted in a fear that she will repeat the cycle and become the kind of mother that her own mother was. The fact that her fears are confirmed reinforces the similarities in their characters.

We might also argue that Helene's unusually strong bond to her older sister Martha merits closer attention in the context of the matrilineal narrative, since Martha also plays a central role in Helene's development. Certainly, she is her most important influence in her formative years, and Helene owes her upbringing to Martha more than to anyone else. Through their years in Berlin and after Helene's marriage to Wilhelm, they remain very close; Martha is always the first person Helene turns to, and it is her opinion and approval that she seeks more than anyone else's. We might even go so far as to say that Martha is the love of Helene's life. Her devotion to her older sister goes beyond mere familial love and gratitude to the older sister

who has mothered her in place of her mother. Helene's first sexual experiences are with Martha, and she compares her subsequent lovers to her. In the epilogue to the novel, we learn through 17-year old Peter that his mother is not in a position to accept him back into her life, as there is no room for him in the tiny apartment she shares with her sister. Thus, where once Martha stepped in to replace Helene's mother, she now takes the place that rightfully belongs to her child.

## Conclusion

The matrilineal narrative is often associated with texts that have an autobiographical impetus;<sup>31</sup> women writers use it to trace their own development as individuals and as subjects and to understand themselves as part of a historical progression or familial chain. Julia Franck's acknowledgment that her exploration of female lineage in *Die Mittagsfrau* is both connected to an endeavor to understand an episode in her family past and provoked by her own experience of becoming a mother suggests that her novel can also be read in this light.

Through the complex female characters that Franck creates in this novel, she explores the possibilities and limitations of maternal influence. Through her matrilineal narrative, she explores how women can shape the characters of the women around them to the extent that they can actually alter the course of events. Furthermore, her *historia matria* also considers this idea on a wider scale; it examines how women -- mothers, daughters, and sisters -- contribute to shaping the course of history. Her novel reflects issues that preoccupy other contemporary writers: the relationship between the individual and history, the function and meaning of motherhood today, the relationship between the past and the present. At the same time, she takes a unique stance on these issues. The narrative structure of the novel, and in particular the shift in narrative perspective, allow for the fact that there are always a number of different ways of



looking at an issue, and each individual has something to add to the discussion. Franck's novel offers a rich and detailed image of a very difficult era in recent German history. By approaching it from the maternal perspective, she adds a new aspect to the discussion and a new dimension to contemporary German literature.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Claus Setzer, "Julia Franck is awarded the German Book Prize 2007 for her novel *Die Mittagsfrau*," Press release of the Deutscher Börsenverein, 5 October 2007, available on <http://www.boersenverein.de/de/135031> (accessed 19 August 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Volker Hage, "Ganz schön abgedreht," *Der Spiegel*, 12 (1999), 244–246.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the phenomenon of the "Fräuleinwunder" and its appropriateness for contemporary German literature by women, see Heike Bartel and Elizabeth Boa, eds., *Pushing at Boundaries: Approaches to Contemporary German Writers from Karen Duve to Jenny Erpenbeck* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006). See also Christine Caemmerer, Walter Delabar, and Helga Meise, eds., *Fräuleinwunder literarisch: Literatur von Frauen zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005) and Heidelinde Müller, *Das "literarische Fräuleinwunder."* *Inspektion eines Phänomens der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur in Einzelfallstudien* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Julia Franck, "The Wonder (of) Woman," trans. Alexandra Merley Hill, *Women in German Yearbook* 24 (2008): 235–240, 236.

<sup>5</sup> Wiebke Eden, "Julia Franck: 'Beim Schreiben ist man mit sich und der Geschichte allein,'" in "Keine Angst vor großen Gefühlen." *Die neuen Schriftstellerinnen* (Berlin: Edition Ebersbach, 2001), 23–32, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Franck, in Susanne Geu, "Schreiben zum Überleben. Interview," *ZEIT online*, 10 October 2007, <http://www.zeit.de/online/2007/40/interview-julia-franck> (accessed 10 July 2010). My translation.

<sup>7</sup> Other novels discussed in this volume that deal in a similar way with specific epoques in German and European history include Vladimir Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* (2003), Terézia Mora's *Alle Tage* (2004) and Saša Stanišić's *Wie der Soldat das Grammophon repariert* (2006)..

<sup>8</sup> Julia Franck, in Stacey Knecht, "Interview with Julia Franck," *The Ledge*, an independent platform for world literature. Available on <http://www.the-ledge.com/HTML/conversation.php?ID=28&lan=uk> (accessed 10 June 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in The Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to The Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1997), 102.

<sup>10</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the similarities and difference between these three strands of historical analysis, see Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, "Social History -- Cultural History -- Alltagsgeschichte -- Microhistory: In-Between Methodologies and Conceptual Frameworks," *Journal of Microhistory* (2006), available on <http://www.microhistory.org/pivot/entry.php?id=20> (accessed 10 June 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Knecht, "Interview with Julia Franck."

<sup>12</sup> Luis González y González, "El arte de la microhistoria," *Invitación a la microhistoria*, (México: Edición Clío, 1997), 11–47, 16. Carlo Ginzburg also uses the phrase "matria history" as an English translation of González's terminology in Carlo Ginzburg, John Tedeschi, and Anne C. Tedeschi, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20.1 (1993): 10–35, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Franck, *The Blind Side of the Heart*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Random House, 2009), 229. Hereafter page numbers in brackets in the main body of the text.

<sup>14</sup> Setzer, Press Release of the Deutscher Börsenverein.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Elmar Krekeler, "Das erkaltete Herz," *Die Welt*, 29 September 2007; Antje Korschmeier, "Blindheit des Herzens," *Die Tageszeitung*, 29-30 September 2007; Katharina Döbler, "Peterchens Mutter," *Die Zeit* 6 September 2007; Matthias Schreiber, "Düstere Lichtgestalt," *Der Spiegel*, 17 September 2007; Nico Bleutge, "Meisterin der Handwerkskunst," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 17 October 2007.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Christoph Schröder, "Das abgestorbene Innenleben," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 18 September 2007; Jörg Magenau, "Eine duldsame Frau," *Falter*, 12 October 2007; Stefan Tolksdorf, "Die Erblindung eines Herzens," *Badische Zeitung*, 6 October 2007. It is noteworthy also that Random House opted to use the image of a young boy standing alone by his suitcase on an empty station platform for the cover of the English translation of Franck's novel.

<sup>17</sup> Media reports on this subject range from the moderate, such as a themed issue of the *Spiegel* magazine entitled "Wieviel Mutter braucht das Kind?" *Der Spiegel*, 9 (2008), to the sensational headline of a German tabloid, "Baby shock: We Germans are dying out!" *Bild-Zeitung*, 15 March 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Eva Herman, *Das Eva-Prinzip. Für eine neue Weiblichkeit* (Starnberg: Pendo, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Alice Schwarzer, *Die Antwort* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Norgard Klages, *Look back in anger: Mother-daughter and Father-daughter relationships in women's autobiographical writings of the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 11–12.

<sup>21</sup> A useful and interesting analysis of mother-figures in the literature of this era is provided by Emily Jeremiah, *Troubling Maternity: Mothering, Agency, and Ethics in Women's Writing in German of the 1970s and 1980s* (Leeds; Maney/MHRA, 2003). See also Katharina Aulls, *Verbunden und Gebunden. Mutter-Tochter-Beziehungen in sechs Romanen der siebziger und achtziger Jahre* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1993) and Renate Darnedde, *Mutterschatten -- Schattenmütter. Muttergestalten und Mutter-Tochter-Beziehungen in deutschsprachiger Prosa* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Dakin Quinn, "An open Letter to Institutional Mothers," in *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*, ed. Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1997), 174–82, 179. Astrid Henry also develops the idea of the matrophor in her book *Not My Mother's Sister. Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004). I am grateful to Hester Baer for bringing this term to my attention.

<sup>23</sup> Alexandra Merley Hill offers an insightful overview of this debate and Julia Franck's engagement with it in "'Female Sobriety': Feminism, Motherhood, and the Works of Julia Franck," *Women in German Yearbook* 24 (2008): 209–228.

<sup>24</sup> Anke Dürr, Ulrike Knöfel, and Claudia Voigt, "Weder Muse noch Madonna," *Der Spiegel*, 28 (2008), 136–9, 139. My translation.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Franck comments on this criticism of her language, which she links to readers' and critics' expectations of women's writing: "I don't think my novels are cold -- on the contrary. My language is just very clear. But readers would rather a female writer give them a happy ending, or at least offer them comfort," Knecht, "Interview with Julia Franck."

<sup>27</sup> See for example Christoph Schröder, "Das abgestorbene Innenleben," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 217, 18 September 2007, and Karl-Markus Gauß, "Die Kälte des Sommers," *Die Presse*, 6 October 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Tess Cosslett, "Feminism, Matrilinealism, and the 'House of Women' in Contemporary Women's Fiction," *Journal of Gender Studies* 5.1 (1996): 7–17, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Yi-Lin Yu, *Mother She Wrote. Matrilineal Narratives in Contemporary Women's Writing*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Yu, *Mother She Wrote*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Cosslett, "Feminism, Matrilinealism, and the 'House of Women' in Contemporary Women's Fiction," 9.